THE WINNING OF ELIZABETH FOTHERGILL

By U. L. SILBERRAD

I.—THE WINNING.

IT was at the Fox and Grapes that the affair began. There, one wet evening in October, came Will Gifford, he to whom Elizabeth Fothergill was bound by a promise of marriage. This Gifford, though selected by old Fothergill before his death as the man to take Elizabeth and her farm, was not of the highest reputation—at least not in London, where he was known: hereabout people were not so well acquainted with him. On this particular evening he came to the Fox and Grapes, meaning to spend the night there and go on his way the next day. To the inn likewise there came a young gentleman who was also passing through the town. The two of them got to conversation and afterward to cards—a thing which not infrequently happened in the company of Gifford, who earned more by gaming than by any known work. Those who were acquainted with him in London were not so ready to play with him; but the young gentleman by reason of his rawness and the dullness of the unfashionable place, was eager and willing, and soon they were deep in piquet.

There was some company present, but mostly of the substantial and commoner sort, more interested in talking of their stock or merchandise than in concerning themselves in the fleecing of any youth. Thus it happened that the two played almost unobserved for some time. But after a while there entered one who was not known to the stout men by the stove, and who, it seemed, had neither share or interest in their talk. He crossed the room and sat down by the window embrasure where Gifford and the youth were at play. Gifford glanced at him, trying, by his wide knowledge of the world's byways, to judge what sort he might be. His clothing was plain and shabby—indeed, from that one might well take him to be an artisan, but his lithe figure and gait, easy and tireless as a wolf-hound, seemed to deny it. His face gave little index to his calling—it was lean and swarthy, and tanned by many winds and suns; but the mouth, crooked and whimsical, did not look like a soldier of fortune; and the eyes, keen as a hawk's, were not those of a mountebank.

This man, whoever he might be, sat and watched the play a while. At last he turned away, as if he were weary of the monotony of Gifford's luck, and, drawing a small table toward him, began a game of his own. The youth had his back that way, and was, besides, too eager with his own affairs to notice; but Gifford could see well, and, finding his present prey so easy as to need little skill, he had leisure to observe. The swarthy man had taken a pack of Bohemian cards from his pocket; with them he played the curious, intricate game that was played by the wandering people before the gay pasteboards were known to the courts of Europe. Gifford had heard rumors both of the game and the cards, but had never seen either before; and he watched with all the attention he could spare, becoming momentarily more and more interested.

At last that which was bound to happen took place—the young gentleman lost all he had with him to lose. Gifford made it a rule never to play for promises with chance players in chance places, so their game came to an end. But before many more minutes were past he had challenged the new-comer. The swarthy man looked up, but refused courteously; he seemed to prefer his own solitary game. Gifford seated himself at the opposite side of the table and watched. The man played deliberately, yet, it would seem, with skill. Gifford observed his hands as he played—the skin toughened as if from working with heat, yet the fingers very sensitive, and the muscles extraordinarily strong.

But the observer was too truly a gamester to be long content to look on merely; so soon he picked up the king of hearts, which, in the Tarot cards, are represented by cups.

"'Tis a strange, heathenish pack," said he.

"Of foreign make," the other answered.

"So I should have guessed," Gifford said. "I know nothing of such pretty things, though with the common sort I can do something. What say you—when your problem is all worked out, shall we play a little to pass the time? Name your game—piquet, ombre, what you will."

This time the other did not refuse, and when his game was brought to an end he declared himself happy to oblige. Instantly, before the Tarot pack was well cleared away, Gifford had the other cards on the table, and the candles snuffed and well placed. Then the two of them sat seriously to play ombre, for that was the game the stranger approved.

For an hour they played, with never a word spoken but what appertained to the game. For that hour, though the play was close, the stakes were small. It would seem that the swarthy man was poor, and had little with him to risk, for, with his consent, the stakes increased as he won—as win he did with a deadly persistence.

Gifford moistened his lips and glanced furtively at his antagonist; then he called for wine and more light. "It's dark as hell," he said, and looked at the other as if he thought he had guidance for his play from the nether world.

But the swarthy man showed no resentment, though he refused to drink when the wine was brought. "I am like the beasts that perish," said he, "and only drink when I am thirsty, and then water for choice."

Gifford drained his glass. "'Tis cheap, anyhow," he sneered.

"It is so," the other answered, and shuffled the cards.

The men by the stove still talked of their cattle and business—at least, the most of them did; one, younger than the others, but a stout and worthy farmer, had drawn nearer. Little had been said, hardly a word he could have heard, nevertheless something of the excitement of play had been communicated to him, and so brought him to join the young gentleman who, aroused from his misfortunes, had begun sullenly to watch the game.

By this time both players were absorbed again, and there was no sound but the soft flitter-flutter of the cards as they fell in the candlelight, and the chink of money that changed owners. The play was higher, but close as before. Luck smiled one way or luck smiled the other, or maybe the smiles were helped a little by the gamester who had won earlier that evening; but always the end was the same, he lost and lost and lost again. Did the cards frown on him, then his opponent played recklessly, and won but by a shave; did the cards smile, then the swarthy man played with care, and won again. And if Gifford, by some trick, courted the favor that seemed otherwise denied him, still the other was equal to it, though he never cast a doubt on the play.

The sweat broke out on the gamester's brow; he played desperately, plunging at random, and the other won; he played falsely, with a falsity so keen a player should have observed, but never a word did his opponent say, only he forestalled him, and won again.

Gifford shifted the candles with hands that twitched so that the flame went all aslant, and the grease ran down. "You to deal," he muttered, and the youth looking on, thought he said "Curse you;" but no one took any heed.

The men by the fire began to move; those that lived near set off for their homes, muffling their throats, and breathing spiced cordial as they said their good nights; those who had come from a distance, and must be early astir on the morrow, called for their candles—twenty fortunes lost at cards would not keep them from their proper rest. Soon there was left only the two who played, and the two who looked on. In the smoky room there was no light but in the embrasure where they sat, and no sound but the shuffle and flutter of the cards as they fell. Gifford drank once and drank again, and once the other snuffed the candles. Higher and higher the stakes were raised. Fast the gay pasteboards fell, then slow for caution and fast again for wrath. An oath muttered here, a trap set there, a taunt, a threat, a mutter of rage; but the end was the same, the swarthy man won and won, till it seemed the devil himself must guide his play.

"Curse you!" Gifford cried at last; "I thought it was a man I asked to play, not a hound from hell!" and he flung the last coins across the table.

The other picked them up. "From that I take it you have no more to lose."

"You lie!" Gifford retorted. "But I do not choose to play more with you; I am used to playing with honest gentlemen."

"More honest than wise, perhaps."

Gifford turned about sharply. "Do you insult me?" he asked, with his hand on his sword.

The other smiled. "No, friend, I could not," said he. He slipped the pack of cards through his hand. "Then you play no more tonight?" he asked. "It surprises me that you played so long, seeing that it was but a losing game, and the stakes at the end were high—too high for a man who plays to win."

The silly youth laughed here, but the farmer kept grave; he knew they were near the edge of things. Gifford sat down in his chair again. "Put that back," he commanded, pointing to the money that the other was beginning to sort. "Put it all back, and, by the power of God! we will play one game more. A worthy game it shall be. We will have no paltry ones and twos; the winner takes all. You shall put all you've won upon it, and I will put Elizabeth Fothergill, her house, and dower."

The swarthy man went on dividing the moneys. "I do not know that I have any use for Elizabeth Fothergill, her house and dower," he said.

The landlord had twice come to them as they sat over their cards, and twice he had been sent about his business. The last time he had gone no farther than the stove, where he had sat down, fearful lest some quarrel should arise. Now he rose hastily. "Sirs, sirs," said he. "Surely this has gone far enough!"

But the youth cried out that he was a spoil-sport, and Gifford, after he had, with an oath, bade him hold his tongue, turned back to his opponent.

"You are not a married man?" he asked. "Well, then, know that the man who weds Elizabeth Fothergill has but to hang his hat behind the door and do nothing for the rest of his life. She is a decent figure of a woman, too, and almost as much bound to me by her old father as if the wedding ring were already on. She is mine to dispose of, and, by heaven! I'll put her upon the game!"

"Dear sirs!" the landlord again entreated.

But Gifford disregarded him. "I will set her in writing," he sneered, "and put her on the table, since it seems you know so little of honesty."

"I know so much of dishonesty," the other answered, "that I would sooner have it so."

Gifford called for pen and paper and the landlord fetched them. Then the document was drawn up and witnessed by mine host protesting, and the youth eagerly, the farmer insisting on adding his scrawl too. Then it was put on the table, the candles snuffed afresh, and the cards dealt.

From the very first it was plain to the farmer, who had watched the play so long, that the swarthy man would win again. Fortune had not favored him particularly in the disposal of the cards, nevertheless the watcher felt sure Gifford would not keep Elizabeth Fothergill and the rules of fair play likewise. So, since he doubted his readiness to lose the one, he set himself to see that he kept the other; for, though but a yeoman, he loved fair play, and meant to see it. The youth pressed eagerly to the table too; the landlord also hovered near, but that from fear of some mischief done, not from any interest in the affair. So they three looked on while the pair played the longest game that yet had been. It was slow, for the swarthy man did not win easily with one coup, as it is likely he could. Rather point by point, each time betting Gifford a little, till, from exultation and confidence in his victory, the poor wretch came gradually to a feeling as of a net cast about him—an escape which seemed possible, but was just beyond his reach. His face grew livid, with ugly splotches of color upon it; his hand shook, and once he muttered a curse, and once he muttered that the devil was in it.

"Ay," the stout farmer made answer, "your play smacks of him, master; there's more than a flavor of the Father of Lies in it."

Gifford turned furiously upon him. "Do you speak to me, clodhopper?" he cried. "By the body of God! I'll teach you!"

He lunged forward as he spoke; but the landlord, fearing an affray, intercepted him, and entreated him to be calm.

"Play the game out," the youth cried. "Slit his throat afterward, man, but play the game out first!" and he pulled Gifford's sleeve.

Mine host took the farmer by the arm at the same minute, and, leading him a step away, began saying something in his ear. Gifford glared after him, then at his opponent, who sat composedly waiting, his two last cards in his hand. "Deal with him afterward," the youth at his elbow urged; "'tis a shame to spoil so fine a game for a fool."

Gifford sat down again, and the game which was to decide Elizabeth Fothergill's husband was played out, the farmer, held in reluctant converse by mine host, missing the last of the play. But before the end he raised his voice above the landlord's conciliatory tongue. "By the Lord! he played false—he played false with the king—I'll swear it!"

"And I," the swarthy man said, as he laid down his last card. "But it is of no consequence, since it has not helped him to keep either his money or his lady—which both, honorable sir"—and he bowed to Gifford as he took up the trick,—"it seems, are mine by the fortune of play."

After that there was something of an uproar.

II—THE WAITING.

News travels fast without the aid of posts; it was not so late on the morrow that Elizabeth Fothergill heard of the doings at the Fox and Grapes. The tale came to her in scraps, making together a pretty piece of news; her name, it seemed by this, had been bandied about in a pot-house brawl, her fair fame staked on the throw of the dice, and herself, her hand and dower lost by Will Gifford to a man unknown. So ran the tale; but how much truth it had she could not be sure, so she sent Nan, the nurse, to find out.

It was late in the day when Nan came back to her fosterling's farm; it was two miles to the town, and she was old, and so had been bound to stay and rest with her gossip before she set out home again. Now, however, as twilight fell she came hurrying back. Elizabeth sat in the kitchen, where the firelight danced and the shadows of hams and herbs and onion-strings looked like old men that bobbed on the ceiling beam. A door stood open at the farther end; through it one could see the dairymaids still hard at work, though not too busy to nod their heads together now and then as they peeped at the figure that sat proud and straight by the fire. By-and-by in came Nan, still cloaked and bonneted. "Oh, dear!" and "Oh, bless me!" the dairymaids heard, and "It's a weary way and the roads are bad!" Then as if to spite them the door was shut between and they heard no more.

Nan had plumped herself down in the elbow-chair—"Oh, my poor dearie!" she said, "it's a sad, sad world!"

"Then the tale is true?" Elizabeth asked.

The old nurse nodded her head. "In part," she said, then she broke out into exclamations. "Oh, the good-for-nothing man! The heathen, heartless knave!" and so forth.

Elizabeth gave but little heed; at least, however, she asked, "Who is the man?"

But that was more than Nan could say. "And Thomas of the Long Farm could not tell either," said she, "though he was there and saw the whole. He says the fellow was of no condition, but a master with the cards and wondrous strong in the arm, as was shown when they came to settle things after."

Elizabeth's eyes glittered as she looked at the fire. "So they fought for me in their cups as well as played for my farm," she said.

The old woman shook her head drearily. "It's a rare bad world," sighed she.

But she had picked up more gossip from Thomas, who had been witness last night, and it was not likely she could keep it all to herself. "The stranger man was of a gypsy sort, Thomas thought, but he was off betimes in the morning, and Thomas did not know which way he went. He was black to look at, and strange in his ways, drinking but water and playing some fortune-teller's game by himself with heathenish cards of his own providing." She paused; but this account of her husband that was to be brought forth no remark from Elizabeth; so after a little the old woman fell to shaking her head again. "It's a bad business," said she, with sorrowful relish, "and a bad husband you'll have, too, I fear me. He's a spendthrift, that's clear; though he won a deal from Will Gifford he gave the most part to a young gentleman in the house that same night—there's for you! Lightly come, lightly go—'tis always so."

"Why did he do it?" Elizabeth asked.

"Will had earlier won it from the young gentleman," Nan told her. "Thomas said the play was not fair. I know naught of such pothers, but Thomas was clean against your man for giving the money; he says what's the world comin' to if we are to ask how folks get the money we earn? If we earn it fair it's all we've got to do—and enough, too, for most. I fear, dearie, your man's but a fool."

"And Will, it is clear, was a knave," so Elizabeth answered. Then, after a moment, she said, "See now, all the countryside will be talking of this; let them talk, and set them right on nothing: I doubt not we shall have the winner here soon enough. Till then—ay, and afterward—we will tell our neighbors nothing."

Nan agreed, though it did not please her over well, except that at that rheumatic season of the year it was not so easy to get about. Soon after the old woman toddled away, and for a moment Elizabeth stood alone, looking into the fire, her mouth shut hard and her eyes shining. The winner would be here soon enough; and she—his winnings—would receive him. She did not think to repudiate the bargain—indeed, were he a man of will she knew it were well-nigh impossible for her to do it, though the law might give her power; but she could make him think twice before he took the bargain over. She smiled grimly as she thought of the man of no condition who would come gaily to take over Will Gifford's contract—to hang his hat behind the door, wed his chattel bride, and master the farm. Let him do it if he would, let him come today if he chose. Doubtless he would come today, tomorrow at the latest.

But he did not. That day passed, and the next, and the man of no condition did not come. The girls talked among themselves, wondering if, indeed, the tale could be true, since nothing had come of it. Elizabeth said nothing, but looked more severely to the ways of her household, keeping the chattering maids well occupied, but in her heart there was black anger. She had been angry when she thought of the man who had won her at play coming gaily post-haste to take possession, without pause for decorum or by your leave. But she was more angry still when she thought of him tarrying, as if the bargain were not even worth coming to view.

She was in this state of mind when on Sunday came Tobiah the Dissenter to the farm. Elizabeth, in the pride of her heart and her desire to show the congregation she was ashamed of nothing, had walked to the meeting-room in the town; Tobiah, seeing her there, had thought fit to say he would dine at her house that day. She could not refuse the honor; indeed she had no wish to, and the good man walked home with her. Tobiah had not thus invited himself because he had a great appreciation of her person or her dinner, though the one was more than tolerable and the other likely to equal it. The reason was a desire to find out the truth of the rumors he had heard; for Elizabeth, though she did not always attend meeting, was a member of the flock, and, being young and deprived of both parents, Tobiah perceived plainly that it was his duty to see into this matter of hers. Accordingly he walked home with her and asked the truth of the tale. She, after a moment's consideration, told him what she knew.

The good man was very wroth; the sin of gaming was great in his eyes, and money, lands, and gear won at cards he held to be no better than stolen. "This man has no power over you whatsoever," said he; "he has no better right to your body, soul, or land than I. When he comes here, thinking to take possession, send to me and I will come and speak with him; it is a matter in which the spirit is likely to give me forcible utterance."

Elizabeth seemed to agree, but did not give any promise; she privately thought it was a matter in which he own spirit would be able to give her utterance without help from Tobiah. The Dissenter was not entirely deceived by her manner, and for that reason, and in case she should forget to send for him, he determined to come that way again when the weather was fair.

(To Be Continued Next Sunday.)

TO PLEASE MR. PITKIN ⁘ A ROMANCE OF LOVE ⁘ By TOM GALLON

"IF I could only find something that'd bring 'em together, I think I'd really face Mrs. Pitkin, and put up with the consequences."

In that remarkable sentence Mr. Pitkin summed up at once his ambitions, his hopes, and his fears. If you had known Mr. Joseph Pitkin, and had also been acquainted with Mrs. Joseph Pitkin, you would have been astonished at the sheer audacity which prompted him to do anything which should offend her. For Mr. Joseph Pitkin was small and mild—one of those long-suffering individuals whose chief mission in life is to wed large ladies, and thereafter to pay a dreadful price for that one indiscretion. And Mr. Pitkin was a very large lady indeed.

Mr. Pitkin was a small man, with what can best be described as a "blown-about" appearance. He had weak grayish hair at the sides and back of his head, brushed back so strongly that he always looked as though he was facing a heavy wind, and that the heavy wind in earlier years had absolutely blown his hair off the top of his head; to carry the metaphor further, he spoke in gasps, as though battling with the wind, and had watery blue eyes, as though that same wind had been too much for him.

Mrs. Pitkin was of a large and stern aspect, ruling her household with a rod of iron, and apparently despising Mr. Pitkin. Mr. Pitkin was the ostensible proprietor of "Pitkin's Private Hotel," but Mrs. Pitkin could have told you another tale. Mr. Joseph Pitkin went out in the morning, and was supposed to dabble in vast financial affairs, somewhere east of the Mansion House; he came home at night (without any direct results in his pockets), and listened for an hour or two afterward to a long recital of Mrs. Pitkin's woes, and an oft-reiterated inquiry as to why she had ever united herself to him.

At the time this faithful history begins Mrs. Joseph Pitkin had gone on a visit to a sister (reputed to be even more firm and forbidding of aspect than herself), and Mr. Joseph Pitkin was free. More than that, a diabolical scheme had matured in the brain of Mr. Pitkin, and he meant to carry it out. He trembled a little when he thought of it; but his resolve was taken, and he was not to be shaken from it.

"I'll bring 'em together!" said Mr. Pitkin, wondering a little at his own boldness.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Pitkin had suddenly found himself involved in a romantic episode. Of course, he need not have touched it; but, despite Mrs. Pitkin, he was of a romantic nature himself, and was rather pleased than otherwise to find himself mixed up in the affair.

Such a very poor and ordinary affair it was! It had happened some years before that Mrs. Pitkin had taken into her establishment (as a matter of charity, she declared) a young girl to assist her in regard to "Pitkin's Private Hotel," and had, from that time onward, got a little more out of her than she could have got out of two average servants, and had been able to abuse her in a way no self-respecting servant would have stood for five minutes. Little Deborah Rendle had stood it, for the sake of bread and butter, for three years; had seen the great world to which, under happier circumstances, she might have belonged slipping away from her; had done everything for "Pitkin's"—from the keeping of accounts to the making of beds on an emergency.

She was a pretty girl, and, what is better, a nice girl. She was always cheerful and bright and kind; she had long ago subdued what spirit had been left in her; she had long ago forgotten, apparently, that there was any world outside "Pitkin's." And—strangest thing of all—she was a lady—in thought and feeling and manner.

Suddenly into the midst of her life had come that one element of romance. A certain nephew of Mrs. Pitkin—one Frank Dornton—paid an unexpected visit to his aunt. He was a young journalist, struggling and fighting to plant his little banner of fame somewhere in London; full of hope and buoyancy, and bringing with him a breath from the great world that was not bounded by Bloomsbury and Tottenham Court Road.

And, of course, in the very nature of things, Frank Dornton fell in love with little Deborah Rendle. He was poor, and so was she; he was friendless, and she was nearly so; and both were young. So that it happened that he came oftener to "Pitkin's" than his desire for the society of Mrs. Pitkin seemed to warrant.

Now, the mild and gentle Joseph Pitkin had eyes to see matters of which Mrs. Pitkin would never have dreamed. Perhaps, in some faraway corner of a heart which Mrs. Pitkin had merely dipped into, Mr. Pitkin held a vague desire to give some one a better chance in Love's lottery than he had drawn himself. Be that as it may, he became vastly interested in this little affair, saw possibilities in it he had not grasped himself, and determined to do what he could to bring it to a happy conclusion. Of course, he had a dreadful fear that Mrs. Pitkin would storm and rave and make his life a misery afterward, but that didn't matter.

Watching with wistful eyes, Mr. Pitkin saw many things. He saw that the patient girl—conscious only that she poor and shabby and of no account—resolutely thrust away from her any hope that the young man cared for her; he saw, on the other hand, that Frank Dornton, for his part, was shy and diffident about saying anything to the girl. Mr. Pitkin—trembling at the idea of that dreadful scheme of his—yet determined to put it in operation.

The absence of Mrs. Pitkin on the visit to her formidable sister gave him an opportunity. Rules were relaxed at "Pitkin's" at that time; Mr. Joseph Pitkin took a turn up and down the street, and smoked a pipe in comfort, the while he thought about his young friends. And there, coming toward him, was Frank Dornton.

Frank waited at the door until the strolling Mr. Pitkin should return; then he asked, casually, for his aunt.

"Gone away for a day or two," said Mr. Pitkin.

"You must miss her, sir," ventured Frank.

"Things are—quieter," said Mr. Pitkin, with a sigh. And then he added, with a careless, casual glance at the sky above "Pitkin's," "Deborah is inside; you'll find her in the little room at the end of the hall."

It is quite surprising how soon you can get along a hall if you are in a hurry; Frank Dornton did it in record time. And then it was that Joseph Pitkin, with a fluttering heart knocked out the ashes from his pipe, put the pipe in his pocket, and went into "Pitkin's" with a stealthy step.

He waited five minutes, and then he went along the hall, and opened the door of the little room at the end. Deborah Rendle sat making up accounts at a little table; Frank Dornton was looking at her, as though making up his mind to say something. Mr. Pitkin thrust back that "blown-about" hair of his a little more, and smiled, and addressed them.

"When I married Mrs. P.," was his first surprising remark, "Mrs. P. gave me no time to reflect; I had a chance to do that afterward. In confidence, I might almost say that Mrs. P. rushed me into it. If I had reflected"—he sighed and shook his head solemnly—"but that's another story. Now, my dears, you've had time enough to reflect; and it seems to me——"

Deborah looked up suddenly from those eternal accounts and caught her breath; the boyish face of Frank Dornton flushed, and he looked at Mr. Pitkin.

"I—I don't understand," began Frank.

"No, of course, you don't understand," said Mr. Pitkin, with a new note in his voice. "You don't understand that there may be such a thing as waiting too long; waiting, in fact, until the brightness has gone out of young eyes and the softness and tenderness out of young voices; waiting till the might-have-been is all there is left to sigh over. My dears"—this quaint little man stretched out his hands toward them with a great hunger in his eyes—"this kind of thing never happened to me; sometimes I wish it had. Now, if you and the lad here have a thought that you'd like—quite apart from Mrs. P.— to set up together in a small way, and if a matter of £50 would be of any use——"

Deborah Rendle had closed the books in a great hurry and was bending her face over them. Frank Dornton had Mr. Pitkin by the arm and was forcibly taking him out of the room. Outside, in the hall, he first vigorously shook hands with him and then asked him what the devil he meant by it. And Mr. Pitkin chuckled; and then, remembering himself, said it was a hard world. There were whispers and mutterings and another shaking of hands; then Mr. Pitkin went off to the kitchen (his usual place at night, for the sake of peace), and Frank Dornton went slowly back to the little room and opened the door.

Deborah Rendle was not busy with the books; on the contrary, the tired head was down on her hands, and she did not know that Frank had come in. When the muttered exclamation on his part called her to herself, she sprang up, with a white face, and drew back from him.

"I'm dreadfully sorry, Miss Rendle," he said; yet there was a twinkle in his eyes. "That old idiot had no right to talk like that."

"Oh, it isn't fair to call him names," said Deborah, gently. "Let us—let us forget all about it; or at least remember it only—only as a joke."

"Well, you see, that's the difficulty; I'm afraid we can't forget all about it."

"Mr. Dornton!"

"I'm dreadfully sorry, Miss Rendle; but it's just a question of whether we shall be brutal—and selfish—and all that kind of thing—or whether we shall study the feelings of other people."

"Please explain," said the girl, in a faint voice.

"Thank you; I will. You see, poor old Pitkin is one of the nicest fellows breathing, although I'm afraid he does have a bad time of it. Now, it happens that—it just shows what funny mistakes people make, doesn't it—having seen us together once or twice, old Pit—we always call him Pit for short, because there isn't much of him, you see—old Pit has set his heart on—well—on getting us married."

"But, Mr. Dornton, how perfectly absurd!"

"Mad, I call it. But people do get such bees in their bonnets. However it seems that poor old Pit has actually been scraping money together in order to—to give us a start, as he calls it."

The girl made a movement toward him, then stopped.

"But don't you see, Mr. Dornton, what a terrible position you place me—I mean he places us—in?"

"Perfectly horrible," said Frank earnestly; and tried to keep his lips still.

"Because, of course, such a thing—such an idea—never entered our minds."

"How could it? But then, you see that's not the difficulty. Poor old Pit doesn't have much pleasure in his life; Mrs. Pitkin—my esteemed aunt, you know—isn't too kind to him. I'm afraid."

"But what has that to do with it, Mr. Dornton?" asked Deborah.

"Everything. The poor old chap has been saving up for it—looking forward to it; and now, in a moment, we cut the ground from under his feet, and show him that it's all a blunder. More than that, he's afraid he's offended us."

"I don't quite see what we can do, Mr Dornton. You can only disabuse his mind in regard to the mistake."

Frank shook his head, "I must decline, Miss Rendle, to break the heart of any confiding man in that callous fashion. I feel that it would be impossible for me to go to poor old Pit in the kitchen, and say to him, 'Look here, you old blunderer, it's all wrong, and you've been scraping up your £50 for nothing.' No Miss Rendle, I can't do it."

"But, Mr. Dornton, you must; there's no other way."

"Well—there is another way," said Frank slowly, without looking at her. "We can adopt a sort of pious fraud; pretend that what he thinks is true. Don't shake your head; it's only for five minutes, and you send poor old Pit away happy. Of course"—he smiled whimsically—"there are a hundred ways out of it afterward. You can jilt me, or I can jilt you; or you can find something out about my past that you don't like; or you may object, in daylight, to the color of my hair. Oh, it'll be quite easy, I assure you."

"And you mean to do all this to please Mr. Pitkin?" asked the girl.

"Absolutely to please poor old Pit!" replied Frank, steadily.

"Of course, Mr. Pitkin has been a good friend to me—about the best friend I've ever had," said the girl, softly. "And, if you really think——"

Frank Dornton waited for nothing more. He hurried out of the room and presently returned with Mr. Pitkin, having subjected that gentleman to some rough usage in the shape of sundry thumps and diggings in the ribs on his way through the hall. Very demurely and quietly he informed the delighted little man that they had been under a misapprehension in regard to what he had meant; that they would be glad of his assistance—quite in a temporary manner, but that they wished the matter kept secret for the present.

"You see, Deborah" (what a wonderful thing it was to be able to say that name aloud for the first time!) "Deborah and I have really been in love with each other—Oh, practically since we first met—haven't we, Deborah?"

"Yes, for quite a long time," said Deborah, in a faint voice; and it was a rather nice thing, after all, to feel that strong arm about her, and to have her head so close to his shoulder.

When, a little later, Frank Dornton walked into the kitchen of "Pitkin's Private Hotel" and found Mr. Pitkin sitting alone, he was smiling very much. They shook hands in silence for quite a long time; and then Frank said:

"I say, old Pit, I couldn't think of taking that—that £50."

"I'm rather glad of that," said Mr. Pitkin, with a chuckle, "because I haven't got it."

Mr. Pitkin has never told the story to Mrs. P., although that lady often wonders how it was that her nephew became so suddenly engaged to Deborah Rendle, and what he possibly could have seen in her to marry her. Mr. Pitkin slips out sometimes at night; he likes to contemplate their happiness, and to feel that he is quite directly responsible for it.—Black and White.

THE NIGHT EDITOR'S CRITICISM.

By ALFRED GWYNNE O'DONNELL.

The poet writes: "I sat upon the shore
And watched the long green combers of the sea
Come swiftly in and break upon the lea."
There's something that would interest me more
Now, if he'd sat upon the raging sea
And watch the great big combers of dry land
Come splashing o'er the water near at hand,
That would have been worth while, it seems to me,
But writing of a thing so commonplace
Is such a wicked waste of ink and space.

He also writes: "I sat beneath a tree,
And, with a book in hand, I watched a bird
Flitting from bough to bough, his song I heard."
This beats that wretched drool about the sea.
If but the bird had sat beneath the tree,
And, with a book in hand, watched the man
Amid those branches do a wild can-can,
That would have been worth writing—yes-sir-ee!
But, when the bird and man were each in place,
To write it up seems almost a disgrace.

Again: "I held a brimming glass in hand,
I drank its sparkling burden at a draught—
My soul was lifted even while I quaffed."
Some more rank twaddle of that same old brand,
Now, had he held the liquor in his hand,
And quaffed the glass—there were a story, sure;
For no physician could that poet cure
When once that tumbler in his midst should land,
In half an hour the poor fool would be dead—
That story would be worth a double head!